



What works? What fails?

FINDINGS FROM THE NAVRONGO COMMUNITY
HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING PROJECT



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Navrongo Health Research Centre

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

WW: *You are the Principal Investigator of the Community Health and Family Planning Project (CHFP), is that right?*

RA: That's right.

WW: *What does that mean?*

RA: Everything. It ranges from developing concepts, getting these concepts on paper as a proposal, sourcing funding, and then getting into the field to do what you have set yourself to do. It involves seeing to it that the work is done according to the protocol documents and meeting deadlines. It involves submitting technical and financial reports. Above all, it involves writing scientific papers and publishing them!

WW: *As a professional nurse, was the CHFP necessary? Did we not know that deploying nurses to village locations would improve access to health care?*

RA: As a professional nurse I think the CHFP couldn't have come at a more opportune time than when it did! We definitely knew that deploying nurses would increase access to health care. Our experience with the PHC concept where village health workers were trained to offer accessible health care to communities tells us this. The question was how do we do it? When I was active in service delivery, it was clear that anytime we were able to keep our outreach schedule for the month—service indicators—especially EPI increased tremendously. The project therefore demonstrated that it is not just enough to post a Community Health Nurse to a village location but requires support systems from the family, supervisors, peers and more importantly the community.



**Ms. Rofina Asuru, PI, CHFP—always
in a good mood**

WW: *Educational attainment in the Kassena-Nankana district is low. How did you get started?*

RA: I remember a paternal cousin who took me to school. He was already in Achimota by then. I really wonder if I would have gone to school but for him. The fact that I was a girl even reduced my chances. Having said that, let me also say that my father really sent this cousin of mine to school and the fact that we are only three girls born to our parents I might have still stood the chance. My first week in school was not pleasant because the other kids beat me a lot! Subsequently I made friends and started enjoying school. It was not easy because I had to do the household chores alongside my schooling. The teachers too did not spare us so there was no truancy.

WW: *How did you become District Director of Health Services (DDHS) in Builsa District?*

RA: I was asked by the then Regional Director of Health Services, Dr. Erasmus Agongo, to take over the Builsa District when the substantive DDHS was going for an MPH course. I had then just completed my first degree at the University of Ghana, Legon.

WW: *Sharing public health and clinical programmes, how did you manage that?*

RA: Well, the staff were very cooperative and ready to work. All I needed to do was to get them involved and acknowledge everybody's contribution. And it worked.

WW: *What were the major challenges you encountered when you were employed in the Navrongo Health Research Centre?*

RA: One major change I faced was finding my exact role. When I came here, it was like I had been working here before! It is true I worked closely with the Centre while I was in the DHMT but then when I was posted to the Centre, I was attached to the CHFP project; I did not know exactly what I was to do. When I reported to Dr. Korshie Nazzar,

the then Director of the Centre, I asked him what I was to do. I remember him telling me that nobody has a job description here. He asked me to go and see Master, the late Asobayire. I had to decide what I wanted to do.

WW: What do you enjoy most about your work?

RA: I don't know if I should say it is enjoyable. It is interesting when everybody looks to you as the head of the project to make the crucial decisions when in fact sometimes you are not sure if these decisions are right. What I enjoy most about the work is attending the community durbars. These are occasions for community members to discuss health issues. I particularly enjoy very much the debates between the men and women about family planning.



Two pairs of lenses are better than one—Ms. Asuru sapping experience from Dr. Erasmus Agongo

something different that draws their colleagues and other people in and outside Ghana to visit them. Thirdly, they are independent and plan their own work routines and take responsibility for their actions. Lastly I will say the monetary reward.

WW: How do you combine family, friends and fieldwork?

RA: It is not easy. I have little social life and I have lost a few friends because I rarely visit them. Everyday there is always unfinished business! My family is trying to cope with my continuous absence.

WW: CHO often seek community placement even though work is hard and days are long. What keeps them motivated?

RA: Several factors keep them motivated. One is the realization that their presence in the communities is much appreciated by the communities. Secondly, they are doing

WW: Everything that is written seems to be saying that nothing failed in the CHFP. Is that true? What has failed?

RA: I don't think it is true to say everything in the CHFP works! The project has performed credibly in mobilizing communities for self-help but in the case where there is really no strong leadership, the project has not been able to sustain the spirit. Construction of traditional compounds for CHO does not work!

WW: How do you intend to end the CHFP?

RA: The CHFP will end with a scale-up to the rest of the district, especially the control area. As you are aware, the experiment covered only 16 communities. We still have about 19 communities in cells 1 and 4 that need to be covered. It is only fair that all those who participated in the experiment are given a share of the benefits.

WW: You always seem to be playing two roles at a time—now you are also the Principal of the newly established Community Health Nurses Training School in Navrongo—how do you combine the two jobs?

RA: With the help of others, things are going on fairly well. At the time when the school fever caught up with everybody, we didn't really think getting a head would be a problem! Then we woke up to the reality. Well I was asked once again by the then Regional Director to hold the fort until a substantive head is found. I have since been acting and I must say I owe our daily success to the dedicated support of Mr. Moses Nanang and Mrs. Olivia Fatchu who are helping out. We are committed to seeing the school succeed so that others can learn from us.



Ms. Asuru in a dialogue with the community

Send questions or comments to: What works? What fails?

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